

Physical Distancing in Classrooms

Introduction

Central District Health (CDH) recognizes the value of in-person learning and the challenge of balancing the risks of COVID-19 and educational, social, and emotional supports. While COVID-19 is circulating in the United States, measures need to be taken in order to ensure that schools operate in a way that minimizes risk to students, staff, and the community.

The following are Central District Health's recommendations for physical distancing standards for school-aged children in a classroom setting. All physical distancing recommendations assume universal masking is practiced throughout the school facility.*

**All students and staff who are able to safely wear a mask should do so. Masks fit correctly and completely cover the nose and mouth without gapping. The CDC offers the following [Guidance for Wearing Masks](#).*

Instructional Areas (e.g. standard classrooms)

- In elementary schools, all students remain at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal — regardless of whether community transmission is low, moderate, substantial, or high.*
- In middle and high schools, students should be at least 3 feet apart in classrooms where mask use is universal and in communities where transmission is low, moderate, or substantial.
- Middle school and high school students should be at least 6 feet apart in communities where transmission is high, if cohorting is not possible. Universal masking should be practiced within the facility regardless of distancing and cohorting capabilities.
 - A cohort is a group of students that stay together during the school day. Successful cohorting involves minimal or no interaction between groups. Additional information can be found in the CDC's [Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#).

*Information on the conversion of CDC and CDH transmission criteria can be found in our [School Crosswalk Document](#).

Additional Considerations

- The use of non-traditional spaces such as auditoriums and gymnasiums, as well as outdoor instruction, should still be considered in order to allow for additional distancing, when possible.
- It is recommended that classroom desks be spaced and face a uniform direction.
- Additional distancing of students, beyond 3 feet, is still encouraged when possible. Six feet is the gold standard and is recommended when schools have the capability to do so at any transmission level.
- At least 6 feet of distance is highly recommended:
 - Between adults in the school building and between adults and students.
 - In common areas, such as school lobbies and auditoriums.
 - When masks can't be worn, such as when eating. Mealtimes in classrooms are not recommended if 6 feet of spacing or cohorting cannot be maintained.
 - During activities when increased exhalation occurs, such as singing, shouting, band practice, sports, or exercise events. These activities should be moved outdoors or to large, well-ventilated spaces whenever possible.
 - In community settings outside of the classroom.
- For contact tracing, the definition of close contacts has not changed. Students who are less than 6 feet from a person diagnosed with COVID-19 for a time period of 15 minutes or more cumulatively over a 24 hour period, should follow proper [K-12 School Quarantine](#) procedure.
 - To assist in contact tracing efforts, it is recommended that spacing between workstations be measured, and seating assignments documented.

Resources

[Guidance for Wearing Masks](#) | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

[Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention](#) | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>

[CDH School Crosswalk Document](#) | CDH

<https://cdh.idaho.gov/pdfs/cd/Coronavirus/Resource%20Docs/schools/2021/CDC%20-%20CDH%20Crosswalk%20for%20School%20Cases.pdf>

[K-12 School Quarantine](#) | CDH

<https://cdh.idaho.gov/pdfs/cd/Coronavirus/Resource%20Docs/schools/2021/School-Quarantine-CDH-Position-2-2-21.pdf>